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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

**Final evaluation report on the Community framework strategy and Community action
programme relating to the Community strategy on gender equality (2001-2006)**

{SEC(2008) 2365}

1. INTRODUCTION

The Community strategy on gender equality was adopted in 2000¹ and a Community programme² was drawn up in 2001 to support the implementation of the framework strategy. In accordance with Article 12 of the Programme Decision, the Commission presented an interim evaluation report to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions³ in 2004. The same Article provided for the presentation of a final evaluation report on the framework strategy and the programme; this report is the subject of the present document and the annex thereto.

2. REALISATION OF THE AIMS OF THE ACTION PROGRAMME AND THE FRAMEWORK STRATEGY

The Commission adopted the Community framework strategy on gender equality (2001-2006) in June 2000. The aim was to establish a single coordinated framework for all the Commission's activities in this field. The strategy set out five priority objectives: gender equality in economic life, equal participation and representation in decision-making, equal access to social rights, gender equality in civil life, and the overcoming of gender stereotypes.

The framework strategy was to achieve its aims through the coordinated action of a number of Community instruments, including legislation, the financial programmes, and the dialogue with employers and employees and civil society. The equality objectives were to be integrated into other policies – on employment, social inclusion, education and training, freedom and justice, science and research, and development cooperation. Specific activities were also aimed at improving the situation of women and men in the sectors that have a direct impact on women and men.

The activities given as examples in the framework strategy were to be implemented by the Commission, the Member States, and bodies operating in the field of gender equality.

The Community action programme was drawn up to support the implementation of the framework strategy through across-the-board and coordination activities. It supported the achievement of the aims of the framework strategy between 2001 and 2006 for a total budget of €61 742 241 spread over the three strands of activity. Strand 3 – cooperation between the parties concerned – absorbed the largest share of the budget (45%), followed by Strand 1 – raising awareness of the Community dimension of equality (38%) – and Strand 2 – Analysis and evaluation (16%).

Financing of **Strand 1** made it possible to conduct transnational awareness campaigns on priority issues under the framework strategy in order to promote better understanding of the equality objectives.

Over the entire period, 57 transnational awareness-raising partnerships brought together the promoters and intermediaries in the field of equality policy. Conferences, held twice a year by the Member States and involving the Council Presidency, provided forums for the discussion

¹ COM(2000) 335 final

² Decision 2001/51/EC

³ SEC(2004) 1047

of various priority issues under the framework strategy: the gender pay gap, women in decision-making, the role of men in promoting equality, and violence against women. The conferences raised awareness of the values underlying the policy of equality and enabled the main protagonists to share the challenges of gender equality.

Strand 2 involved statistical work aimed at improving methods and obtaining data on gender equality that were comparable at European level. A database was set up to chart the situation of women in decision-making and define at European level indicators of the proportion of women occupying positions of responsibility in the world of politics and economic affairs. The analyses and new data met the Commission's requirements by improving its knowledge of matters including, in particular, the pay gap, the under-representation of women in decision-making, reconciling working and private life, and the availability of child-care facilities. The new data supported the Commission's work and policy proposals, thus demonstrating their usefulness. All this work yielded a better understanding of the priority issues under the framework strategy. The publication of the analyses and reports has brought equality policy more into the public eye.

The calls for proposals financed under **Strand 3** were aimed at non-governmental organisations, employers and employees at European level, and transnational networks of regional or local authorities. Over the period in question, 87 transnational exchange partnerships were financed. These activities had a positive impact in that they made equality policies more widely known and enabled civil society and the other partners to be mobilised around questions of equality. Their contribution to equality issues was, however, less tangible and conspicuous than that of the activities under the two other strands.

The programme also enabled **applicant countries** and accession countries to benefit from activities aimed at familiarising them with Community policies and working methods in the field of gender equality. Awareness campaigns on the body of existing Community legislation and practice were conducted in the ten applicant countries and Croatia and Turkey in the form of conferences, seminars, and training on legislation in the field of gender equality. They brought together the public authorities, politicians, employers and employees, and NGOs in order to prepare the countries in question for accession negotiations.

Overall, the programme effectively supported the aims of the framework strategy. The activities designed to support the various objectives were conducted in a way that was complementary to the other financial instruments mentioned in order to achieve the aims of the framework strategy.

In the field of **employment**, the work of the experts helped strengthen the Community dimension of policy on gender equality among national policies through the analysis of national employment plans and the availability of statistics. Community financing (European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and the EQUAL initiative) was a vital instrument for the Lisbon strategy and made a complementary contribution to the implementation of the objectives adopted at the European Council in 2000.

The framework strategy has also clearly resulted in progress on **promoting equality in participation and representation** at Community level. The Commission has supported the participation of women in decision-making by drawing attention to the democratic deficit constituted by the imbalance between men and women in economic, social and political decision-making. Awareness of the phenomenon has improved thanks to the Community database and transnational exchanges on the obstacles encountered by women in their

attempts to gain access to positions of responsibility. Various activities have helped to mobilise parties that have traditionally been relatively insensitive to the aims of equality and to strengthen in particular the position of women in research.

Activities to **promote equal access to social rights** made it possible to accompany the implementation of equality objectives in the open method of coordination in the field of social protection and inclusion, particularly through the work of experts. In order to support the aims of equality in the world, institutional and practical ways of promoting women's rights have been strengthened in development aid.

Various initiatives have been taken in the field of **equality in civil life**. A group of experts specialising in legal questions relating to employment, social affairs and gender equality studied the application of the legislation and legal developments at national and Community level. Other activities concerned NGOs working to combat sex-related violence and trafficking in human beings. The European Refugee Fund and the preparatory work on the integration of nationals of non-member states have also promoted gender equality. Programmes have concerned police and judicial cooperation and contributed to the combating of trafficking in and sexual exploitation of children.

Efforts to overcome **gender stereotypes** were also backed up by activities geared to the respective roles of women and men in society. The education and training programmes supported the efforts to overcome stereotypes and encouraged women to look more in the direction of careers in science and technology. Taking account of the segregation of males and females in education forms part of the process of charting the development of the education and training systems in Europe, particularly with a view to attracting more women to the sciences.

The framework strategy and the programme have made a considerable contribution to improving **governance** at European level. Cooperation between the various parties concerned at national level has been enhanced by the establishment of the group of high-level officials from Member States responsible for integrating equality policy and the high-level group on integrating gender equality into the structural funds. The European-level dialogue with employers and employees has resulted in the establishment of a framework for action on gender equality. Civil society and NGOs have benefited from support aimed at consolidating their roles in the field of gender equality. The implementation of the strategy was monitored by the Commission's internal structures: the Commissioners' Fundamental Rights, Anti-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities Group, and the Interservice Group on Gender Equality.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The aims of the framework strategy were ambitious as they required account to be taken of the principles of equality in all the Union's policies. The five policy areas identified for structuring the framework for Community action corresponded with the main challenges to be taken up in order to support the equality objectives. By presenting this overall framework, the Commission has created the requisite conditions for coordinated implementation of the various instruments. The structural funds have been a crucial financial tool for ensuring that equality is taken into account in the policies of the Member States. Targeted Community activities have increased the effectiveness of legislation on equality and supported the various institutions and civil society in effectively promoting equality in all the areas in question.

The programme has demonstrated its value through its ability to support the implementation of the equality objectives and to strengthen the coordination mechanisms and governance at European level. The measures that have supported the promotion of values and improved understanding of equality questions are very useful for Community action.

Despite this positive assessment, there are still major gender inequalities. In March 2006, the Commission adopted an equality roadmap in order to take up these challenges⁴. This is aimed at combating gender inequality in six priority areas. In order to flesh out its commitments, the Commission is identifying the activities for which it is competent in the various fields and the corresponding deadlines, and strengthening the governance and monitoring mechanisms. The funding for work on equality under the new programme – 'PROGRESS (2007-2013)'⁵ – will make it possible to support the Commission in the implementation of the roadmap activities. By merging the previous programmes into a single programme, PROGRESS also makes it possible to take better account of gender equality in all its activities.

There are still many challenges to be taken up in the field of gender equality that will require the commitment of all the parties concerned. The Commission has undertaken to strengthen its framework for action while calling on the others to play their part. Employers and employees at European level have undertaken to implement their framework for action on equality. Civil society and the NGOs are also determined to strive to eliminate gender inequality. Making progress on gender equality is also a task for the Member States. In March 2006, the European Council gave a clear political signal to the Heads of State and Government by laying down the priorities of equality policy in the European Pact for Gender Equality.

⁴ COM(2006)92 final
⁵ Decision 1672/2006/EC